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POLITICAL EQUALITY FOR WOMEN AND WOMEN'S WAGES

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An examination of the wage-scales of women workers brings out two striking facts: first, the wage level of a large number of women is conspicuously below the level which would make possible competent and efficient life; second, the wage level of women is conspicuously lower than the wage level of men.

On the first point, reference is made to various sources dealing with women's wages in England, such as the report of the parliamentary committee on home work in 1907,¹ the report of the wages boards established under the trade boards act of 1909,² the reports of the bureau of labor on women and child wage earners,³ the reports of commissions established in several states to consider the creation of minimum wage commissions,⁴ and the reports of such minimum wage commissions as have reported determinations, e.g., Massachusetts and Oregon.⁵ These sources furnish material relating to many trades employing women and girls in many sections of the country under urban, village and rural conditions.

In support of the second statement reference is made to Sydney Webb's classic study of women's wages made in 1891;⁶ to the re-

¹ *Reports of Select Committees of House of Commons on Home Work*, 1907, No. 290; 1908, No. 246.

² Constance Smith, "Working of Trade Board Acts in Great Britain and Ireland," in *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. xxii, p. 605, July, 1914.

³ Senate Doc. No. 645, 61 Cong., 2 sess.

⁴ *Massachusetts, Report of the Commission on Minimum Wage Boards*, January, 1912. (House Doc. No. 1697). Boston, 1912. Oregon, Industrial Welfare Commission. Report of the Social Survey Committee of the Consumers' League of Oregon on the wages, hours, and condition of work, and cost and standard of living of woman-wage-earners in Oregon, with special reference to Portland. Portland, 1913, 71 p.

⁵ *Report of Massachusetts Commission on Minimum Wage Boards*, House Doc. (1912) No. 1697. For Oregon see several items in *The Survey*, covering various groups of employes in Portland, and in the state at large.

⁶ Webb, "Alleged Differences in the Wages paid to Men and Women for Similar Work," in *Economic Journal*, vol. i, p. 635.

port of the royal commission on labour;⁷ to Miss Abbott's study of women's wages in America;⁸ and the various volumes of the report on women and child wage earners dealing with the cotton, glass, and silk industries, the sewing trades, selected metal trades, work in laundries, and a number of other selected occupations.

The testimony of all this evidence is to the effect that the wages of women workers range from about one-third to about two-thirds of those of men. As will appear later, this generally does not mean that men and women are paid at these different rates for doing the same work, but what appears is an almost complete separation of function between men and women, with the resulting lack of opportunity for women's employment and consequent lower level of pay for women. Weaving in the cotton and silk industries forms a conspicuous exception and even there the men are often paid either at a higher rate on the assumption that they "tune" or "fix" looms, or are paid for the performance of certain other mechanical duties in addition to their pay as weavers.

The question is raised as to whether the exclusion of women from political power is a factor in either of these anti-social characteristics of women's wages and whether the grant of political power would tend to secure for women more nearly a living wage, to raise the wages of women more nearly to an equality with the wages of men.⁹ It is the purpose of this paper to set forth the considerations leading to a belief that there is an important connection between lack of political equality and this double under-payment of women workers.

⁷ *Report of Royal Commission on Labour* (Cd. 6894), dealing with Women's Work.

⁸ Abbott, *Women in Industry*, chap. xii, pp. 262-316; Appendix C, 363-373.

⁹ The writer is aware that Mrs. Sydney Webb does not agree with the claim of women to equal pay. It is unnecessary to go into that question here, since Mrs. Webb is a suffragist and evidently believes that the ballot can be used by women to secure a more satisfactory wage level, even if she thinks not even political equality will enable them to secure a reward for their labor determined by purely economic considerations. (See *The New Statesman*, August 22, 1914, p. 613.) It is interesting to recall in this connect on the audience recently granted by Mr. Asquith to the deputation of work ng women from East London. Concerning this, the *English Nation* said among other things: "Even more influential than the force of direct pressure from voters will be the new habit of mind in which Parliament, parties, and the press will be trained when they realize that in fact as well as in sentiment women are half the nation."

That connection may be less immediate than is sometimes urged, but it is more far-reaching, more determining and more important than is often understood. Because they have not taken the trouble to follow the arguments, very distinguished writers have made foolish and ill-considered statements about the lack of connection because of the finality of the law of supply and demand. For example, Mr. Dicey in a serious discussion of the subject,¹⁰ quite ignoring the fact that any influence which affects either item in ratio of demand to supply affects the ratio itself, says cuttingly:

Lastly, it is asserted that the possession of votes will increase the earnings of women. This probably is of itself enough to enlist every under-paid and under-fed seamstress or maid-of-all-work in the ranks of the fighting suffragists. The plain answer to it is that the prediction, if it means (as every working woman understands it to mean) that a vote will raise the market value of a woman's work, is false. The ordinary current price of labor depends on economical causes, and is not affected by a man's or a woman's possession of the parliamentary franchise. No master raises his footman's wages because the man-servant happens to be a voter; and he will assuredly not raise the wages of his housemaid because he finds that, under some Woman's Enfranchisement Act, she has got her name placed on the parliamentary register. Why, in the name of common sense, should a vote confer upon a woman a benefit which it has never conferred upon a man? We have throughout this article indeed admitted that woman suffrage does increase the chance of Parliament turning its attention towards the wishes of women, and thus may cause any grievance under which a woman suffers to be the more speedily removed. But this admission is a totally different thing from the assertion that a woman's vote will raise her wages.

The wage level does, of course, depend on "economical causes" and is, of course, determined by the relation between the demand for labor and the supply of labor. Whatever influence operates to lessen the supply at any point relatively to the demand at that point or to intensify the demand relatively to the supply will set in motion "economical causes" and will operate favorably to the worker as compared with the employer; whatever influence increases the supply at any point relatively to the demand or weakens the demand will in the same way operate to the disadvantage of the worker at that point as compared with the employer. Whatever influence leads to decisions based on social, historical, accidental considerations rather than on considerations of efficiency, competence,

¹⁰ *Quarterly Review*, vol. ccix, (No. 418), p. 287, January, 1909.

industrial capacity operates through non-economical causes and acts to the advantage of men and to the disadvantage of women, while influences bringing about decisions based on considerations of capacity and efficiency operate to the advantage of women. The extent to which the wage bargain will be favorable or unfavorable to any group of workers, as compared with the employers, will depend on the extent to which (1) the workers do or do not possess skill of a high industrial or professional character; (2) they have or have not alternative opportunities for employment; (3) they can or can not wait, in case no suitable opportunity offers; (4) they can or can not move from place to place in search of employment; (5) they have or have not bargaining strength and shrewdness; (6) they are or are not conscious of a common interest and able to act together.

Before discussing more at length these factors in the relative strength or weakness of women wage earners, certain distinctions should be drawn between different groups of women workers. Because of the very recent date at which the thirteenth census (1910) of occupations was issued (August, 1914) and the consequent greater familiarity of the classification of occupations adopted by the twelfth census (1900), the latter is retained for the purpose of this discussion. According to that classification, gainfully employed persons were grouped in five large classes of occupations: agriculture, professional, domestic and personal service, trade and transportation, manufacturing and mechanical pursuits. Of the agricultural women, of whom in 1900 there were 977,336, and in 1910 apparently 1,807,050,¹¹ we know little as to wages or conditions of employment. Of those in domestic and personal service, of whom there were in 1900, 2,095,549 and in 1910, 2,620,857, we know that, in 1910, 156,235 (67,988 in 1900) did not earn wages but offered lodgings or took boarders, that 1,595,449 (1,330,692 in 1900) held positions in higher or lower forms of domestic service, an occupation whose characteristic is that it is unstandardized, i.e., one employe may earn high wages under excellent living and working conditions, while another is a drudge and a "slavey" under wretched conditions both for living and working.

In this same group of gainfully employed in domestic and personal service are found also the laundresses and waitresses. So far as these are employed under conditions of domestic employment,

¹¹ *Thirteenth Census, Occupations 1910*, p. 54. See discussion of probable error on this point.

they are again in occupations which can not be made the subject of general characterization. So far, however, as they include workers in power-laundries or in "down-town restaurants," they can be grouped for purposes of discussing their wages with the groups in trade and transportation and in manufacturing and mechanical pursuits. In these groups, employing, in 1900, 1,816,015 and in 1910 2,974,447 women, the position of both men and women wage-earners (individual) is disadvantageous as compared with the employer. In many occupations in these groups a low degree of skill is required, the workers can not wait for employment, there is no way of their learning the state of the labor market, and in bargaining shrewdness the workers who make a bargain only between jobs are at a great disadvantage as compared with the employer's agent who bargains practically all his working life.

Moreover, women are often at a real disadvantage as compared with men. In the first place, it is admitted that they often do not bring the same degree of skill or occupational capacity. They wholly lack the physique for certain occupations, such as construction work or heavy teaming. By unanimous social judgment, their sex disqualifies them for work done under conditions of physical exposure, as in the underground mining, or of moral peril, as in saloons. There are few or no technical schools for them, and they are often from lower age groups and add immaturity to their other disadvantages. It appears, for example, that in 1910, 83 per cent of the gainfully employed males were over 21, and 17 per cent only under 21; while only 66 per cent of all the gainfully employed females were over 21, and 33 per cent were under that age. And in many occupations the relative proportion of women in the younger age groups is much larger than one-third. For example, 68 per cent of the female employes and only 20 per cent of the male employes among glove workers are under 21 years of age; among the candy workers, 68 per cent of the female and 24 per cent of the male; among the glass-workers, 57 per cent of the female and 24 per cent of the male; in soap factories, 56 per cent of the female and 24 per cent of the male; among the telephone and telegraph operators, 47 per cent of the female and 21 per cent of the male; among sales persons 33 per cent of the female and 17 per cent of the male employes are under 21 years of age, while even in coal mining and cotton manufacture—with glass, the great boy-employing industries—the figures are, in

coal, only 15 per cent of the males, and 253 out of the 890 females or 28 per cent of the females under 21 years of age, and in cotton, 48 per cent of the female and 30 (29.9) per cent of the male employes in these lower age groups. Obviously, the facts already stated demonstrate that women are at a disadvantage in the labor market as compared with men. Attention should be called also to the fact that industry and trade as organized under the alleged competitive system of the last century are wholly in the hands of men who often determine employment from considerations of propriety rather than of efficiency, deciding that certain forms of employment are unsuitable to women, so that women lack not only opportunity but inducement to qualify themselves better for highly skilled work. In 1900, while women were scheduled in 295 out of 303 occupations, 86 per cent of them were in only 18. In 1910, the number of occupations listed is a longer list (428 instead of 303), but 82 per cent of the gainfully employed women are found in only 19 of the occupations.¹² The ideals of a feudal state persist in shutting them out of the higher positions in the state, the church, the legal profession, and the positions of corresponding social prestige in big business. They lack, in addition, as compared with men, bargaining capacity and the bargaining habit, and the habit of acting together. Boys "swap" in the alley, while girls care for the baby; men meet each other in the saloon, at the political meeting, in the street; women and girl-workers do their own laundry, make their own clothes, trim their own hats,

¹² Table showing occupations in which there were one per cent or more of the gainfully employed women.

<i>Name of occupants</i>	<i>No. women engaged</i>	<i>Name of occupants</i>	<i>No. women engaged</i>
Farmers.....	257,706	Teachers.....	478,027
Farm laborers (home farm).....	1,176,585	Teachers of Music.....	84,478
Dressmakers and seamstresses.....	447,760	Boarding and Lodging House Keepers.....	142,400
Millinery and Millinery Dealers.....	122,447	Housekeepers and Stewards.....	173,333
Textile.....	352,639	Laundresses.....	520,004
Weavers in textile industries.....	99,434	Midwives and Nurses (not trained)....	117,117
Sewing and Sewing Mach. Oper.		Servants and waitresses.....	1,309,549
Factory.....	231,206	Bookkeepers and Accountants.....	187,155
Tailors and Tailoresses.....	163,795	Clerks (not in stores).....	122,665
Telephone Operators.....	88,262	Stenographers and Typewriters.....	263,315
Clerks in stores.....	111,594		
Saleswomen.....	257,720	Total.....	6,707,191

Total gainfully employed, 8,075,772.

Per cent of total in 19 occupations, 81.8 per cent or 78.1 (if instead of 352,639 textile operatives 99,434 weavers in textile industries be taken).

help with the children, spend their non-working hours as drudges, or eking out their small earnings by their domestic accomplishments.

The first result on women-workers of the youth of so considerable a proportion of their group, of the domestic pressure on their leisure and of their consequent isolation, is the fixing of wages in the occupations into which they are admitted below any possible level of competent living. This does not mean that they supplement their wages by immoral practices, but that with all the industry with which they can use their non-working hours, they are still under-clothed, under-housed, under-fed, without adequate provision for normal recreation, and unable to bear their proper share of the support of their natural dependents.

The second result is the payment of wages not so much unequal to the wages of men but different from the wages of men to an extent much greater than the difference between the economic value of their work and that of men employees. That is, the exploitation of women in these groups may be regarded as the exploitation of men raised at least to the second power. It is on that account that department store work, telephone service, the textile industry, cotton, wool, silk, candy-making, brush-making, corset-making, and many other trades employing a considerable number of women workers may be justly charged with the practice of a double exploitation.

If we look at the professional occupations, we find conditions somewhat different as to age and training. Of the women lawyers only 78 out of 1,343 or 5 per cent are under 21, of men, 452 out of 120,806 or .003 per cent are under 21, and of the 9,015 women physicians only 142 or 2 per cent are under 21, of 142,117 men only 312 or .002 per cent are under 21. Even of the teachers, only 79,032 out of 476,864 women teachers, 16.6 per cent, are under 21, and of 118,442 men teachers, 12,274 or 10.4 per cent are in this age group. But in these lines of activity, while women may obtain the training and are more mature, they too must face the fact that the opportunities they seek are controlled largely by men. If, as has been said, the men in control in industrial or in professional affairs were themselves dominated by industrial, economic or professional considerations, if they would and could give the opportunity to the person who under fair competitive conditions offered the best terms, women would have no complaint to make and would rely on industrial, economic or professional methods for their advancement; but the

reverse is the fact. One has only to compare the relative number of men and women graduates from our colleges bearing the approval of the Phi Beta Kappa Chapters with the relative number of fellowships granted to men and women students, or the relative numbers of candidates for the doctorate taking degrees with high rank with the numbers taken on to college faculties, to perceive something of the disadvantage under which women pursue scholarship.

At the one end of the scale of well-being is found then exploitation based on youth, lack of training, and helplessness; at the other, exclusion. Political equality is therefore invoked for several reasons, and in order to accomplish several results among which will be a gradual readjustment of the wage scale to correspond with the needs of rational living and with the payment of men.

For the more helpless group, the political enfranchisement of women inevitably means the introduction into legislation and governmental action of considerations with which women have been especially concerned. This influence must and will work itself out more conspicuously in connection with physical conditions of work, the limitation of the working day, the prohibition of night work for young women, and the maintenance of sanitary and decent conditions of work. It will, however, inevitably likewise take notice of the significance of the wage below the level of competent and wholesome living and will attack the problem by setting a minimum wage, and also by raising the age of employment, regulating the conditions under which "learners" may be employed and paid, and, perhaps chiefly, by devoting some of the public money and public brains to the question of the industrial education of girls. In other words, it introduces into the situation influences to counteract those forces which at present render this group so peculiarly weak in their wage-bargains both as compared with their employers and with possible men competitors.

It is not claimed that many of these results may not be gained without the political enfranchisement of women, but they will be gained with much greater difficulty and will be on the whole less stable and final without than with the ballot. The state cannot, as a matter of mere psychology, get the best intelligence of its women devoted to these problems until that intelligence is quickened by a sense of full responsibility. But there are also far greater gains than these to be expected. In the case of the professional women, access

to political power alone opens up avenues of employment. Women in the civil service will seem more appropriate when the votes of women are of concern to the appointing power. The women appointed to the police force, the women appointed on the school board, the women put upon the garbage commission, the appointed head of the public welfare bureau, all in Chicago, testify unmistakably to the soundness of this statement. For women lawyers with the ballot there is a new respect shown by men. With the franchise arise legal problems peculiarly affecting women and making more obviously suitable the employment of women. If the votes of women doctors become of importance in connection with questions concerning the medical profession, there are new reasons for admitting them to programs of medical societies and thus new avenues are opened for legitimate professional publicity. Perhaps the situation confronting the members of the teaching profession is most clearly illustrative, because there has been so much foolish and inapplicable discussion of the femininization of the public schools, based wholly on the proportion of women to men in the teaching group. As a matter of fact there is no more masculine organization in the whole community than the public school system. Out of 824 superintendents in cities¹³ having a population of 5,000 and over, only 6 or .007 per cent are women, of whom only one, the distinguished superintendent of the Chicago schools, receive as much as \$2400 a year, while 363 or 44 per cent of men superintendents receive that amount or more. Of the high school principals in cities of 5,000 or over, only 72 out of 936 or less than 8 per cent are women, and of the women only 6, 8 per cent, receive as much as \$2500 while of the 864 men principals 205 or 23 per cent receive that or a larger amount for their services. Among the high school assistant principals, 285 in number, only 93 or 33 per cent are women.

There are, to be sure, a number of women county superintendents of schools, and in a few cities women are found on the boards of education. On the whole, however, the schools are managed by men, generally with as great interest taken in the possibilities of political gain or private enrichment as in the educational requirements of the teachers and children. This has meant the inevitable over-emphasis on expenditures for buildings and grounds in which real estate

¹³ See *Bulletin of United States Bureau of Education*, "Pecuniary Rewards of Teaching."

agents have influence and on choice of text books in which great publishing concerns have interest, and lack of attention to the due compensation and just treatment of the teachers. Any intelligent and honest scrutiny of the problems would inevitably bring about an equalization of the salaries between men and women which would probably be accomplished by the leveling up of the women's pay, both by a raising of the wage-level and by the promotion of a much larger proportion of women to such positions as principalships and to new supervising positions of various kinds. But, again, the great damage results not so much from corruption as from ignorance. The school is not only the great educational agency of the community; under our compulsory school laws, it has been forced to assume many functions as guardian and there should be developed, and would be, if the intelligence of the teachers and of the women had free play, coöperating agencies for which women are peculiarly qualified by nature and by experience, such as effective staffs of school visitors relating the home to the school, the school to the home and both to other resources available for the service of the children.

There would therefore result the opening up of many new lines of employment for which women are particularly fitted, which would relieve the congested condition of the teaching profession. Analagous results are to be expected from the enlightened scrutiny of other organizations. Women in law with political power back of them see in a new way the absurdity of handling many cases as they are handled today. The administration of criminal justice, the management of reform, correctional and penal institutions, the enforcement of pure food, sanitary and labor legislation require, if competently done, the employment of many women.

In these two ways, then, first, by getting in through social legislation under the minimum fixed by such unequal bargaining and thus reducing the possibility of exploitation of the weakest workers, and second, by opening new avenues of employment in public service, in social agencies, in professional relationships and thus relieving the congestion which has been so great a disadvantage to the women workers in the few lines open to them, the wage-bargainer who is too weak will be fairly protected, the fairly competent wage-bargainer will be given new bargaining advantage. The protection at the bottom brings about an enforced reasonableness in demand and an exclusion from supply of the group now utilized, not so much

because of their industrial or occupational capacity as because of their economic weakness—the children in the candy trade, the non-English speaking women in the sewing trades; the opening up of opportunities at the top is nothing more than a lessening of supply at the congested points to the great advantage of the residuum.

Attention may be called in this connection to the enactment of minimum wage legislation during the past two years. Not only have the industrial states of the East and Middle West, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin, each of which has a considerable body of protective legislation on its statute books, taken this further step in the protection of its women-workers, but the non-industrial western states, California, Colorado, Oregon, Utah and Washington, all of which are equal suffrage states, have thrown this protection about their women wage-earners.

Besides this aid from without, political equality brings a very real new spiritual power whose value should not be ignored. It removes an occasion for humiliation and gives a new self-confidence which is of great importance. One great difficulty in securing advancement for girls is that they acquiesce in the general judgment as to their inferiority. Young women who are most contemptuous regarding the ability of certain young men will still feel themselves disqualified in some mysterious way from entering the profession the young men have successfully entered. "It's good wages" (75 cents) "for a girl" is the reply when the girl-worker is asked why she does not get as much as the boy across the way (85 cents). Employers take girl-workers because they are more easily satisfied; "they don't ask for a raise." Women who never asked for the ballot, who never "felt the need of it," confess to a new sense of confidence and self-respect when they have had it bestowed on them and a new courage to urge upon their employer the real value of their services.

The rapidity with which these results will be brought about will, of course, vary greatly with the general intelligence of the community, both men and women, with the nature and organization of employments already open to women, with the alertness with which well-to-do women understand the situation and grasp the opportunity to coöperate consciously with the economic forces, and supplement them when necessary with legislation. For besides removing limitations from about the spirits of women with reference to their own capacity and from about the minds of men as to woman's real sphere, political

enfranchisement obviously places in the hands of women a labor saving device of great possibility.

It is a device with which they can accomplish no result they have not the brains to plan and the courage to undertake. As the sewing machine and the needle are alike useful only to those persons who see the finished garment in relation to the cloth, so the ballot as an instrument can only aid—it cannot serve as a substitute for the plan already formulated. Those who see clearly the end sought and who therefore desire urgently to possess the most efficient instrument are often prevented by their very eagerness from seeing the more remote but more far-reaching and really more important aspects of the claims of women to be admitted to full political equality, because of the important bearing of their political or their economic status.